Video Transcript

https://youtu.be/AGxgGQpyBYM

It tends to just melt everything. The mainstream current, both on the left and the right, is to have deep problems with the fact that all traditional forms of human social organization are so relentlessly dissolved by this fundamental capitalistic trend, which is basically to reconfigure all bonds as flexible contractual relationships.

The great mystery of global politics is that capitalism happening is almost the least popular thing that can possibly happen and also the most irresistible thing. Its critics, both on the left and the right, are outraged and mystified and perplexed. It almost has a kind of mystical quality to it, a sense of being so bizarre.

I think it breeds cults. And what breeds the cult is the disintegration of Christianity — what Nietzsche accused the history of Europeanism. It is compatible with modernity, it is uniquely aligned with modernity, or has been, precisely because it is a process of accelerating disintegration — sectarian subdivision, the progressive collapse of a unified Christian culture that is very continuous long after people are identified with it. It's abstract sectarianism, abstract schism. And it goes into theosophy and UFO cults, and it goes into all kinds of political cults of various kinds. Any tendency that rejects prior unified cultural hegemony in the name of this schism — almost invariably under the banner of liberty — is part of this fundamental trend.

Cultural disintegration provides the opportunity for capitalism to happen. I don't think capitalism is actually some kind of subspecies of this. I don't think it is itself a sect, but I think sectarian disintegration provides the opportunity, by pulverizing these previous forms of social organization and solidarity, for bonds to be reconfigured contractually.

A sufficiently super-exponential trend has to hit an infinity, which is a kind of wall across the future, and you have to hit such a wall if the trend you're on becomes hyperbolic. It's not easy to tell with messy historical data whether you're actually looking at an exponential curve or something more extreme. All of the modern curves have this same crazy path.

There's a spectrum which goes from a very nominalistic notion of humanity — as something that we'll just pin that label on whatever continues up this trend — to the view that the human is something that at a certain point seeks to protect itself.

A very interesting character in this regard is Hugo de Garis. He has a really apocalyptic vision about this: that at a certain point there will be a massive human constituency that, in the name of the

human, will wage — as far as it's concerned — defensive war against the trend that it, not entirely unreasonably, thinks is washing away the human down to its minimal essence.

He says: if you think anything we now mean by "human" can survive a singularity, you're not understanding the radicality of the transition you're talking about. If you're thinking something that is many magnitudes more intelligent — the notion that everything we are and have been is going to play some substantial role in guiding or directing that process is utterly deluding.

I think there's a very general position that is entrenching itself on the left, and it makes a lot of sense given the set of axioms those people are working with: that the endgame of all this is that the complete apparatus of productive machinery is going to be placed indefinitely in the service of some kind of collective human subject. In traditional Marxist terms, there's a dialectical process where technology begins as our servant, becomes our master, and is restored to servitude again.

That final stage is the one that I think calls forth certain questions. If we're in de Garis's world and he's saying we're talking about something that is going to be to us what we are to beetles — how realistic is it that this impending intelligence explosion is going to teleologically subordinate itself to our conception of human well-being and human interest? I don't find that a very plausible scenario.

The story democracy tells about itself is that the sovereign instance within a democracy is the people. Whereas "the Cathedral" is introduced as part of a theoretical machine saying: no, that's a fake, self-serving narrative. The sovereign instance within democracy is that social organ that is able to effectively shape and direct the opinion of the people.

Historically, that organ was the church. The essential power of the church is mind control — to establish, maintain, and direct moral intuitions and notions of legitimate social order. Those functions have been perpetuated, but we no longer typically describe it as a church, even though it is a coherent system.

When you see what is the hegemonic ideology of the modern academy and media system, it looks extremely cohesive. You could lay it out as a series of points of doctrine. If you were going to describe it as a religion, it wouldn't be hard to say: it believes this, this, this — this idea is radically heretical, this idea is a minor heresy. It's a church. But it's a church in denial. And because it has been extremely successful at directing public opinion, it decides the outcome of electoral politics, selects regimes, and decides on the government of democratic societies. That power is what establishes it as the true sovereign within democracy.

If the process continues rhythmically to accelerate, then accelerationism isn't going to go away. The obvious comparison is with the tradition of spontaneous order.

What is accelerating is the big question. Understanding has gathered that the market economy and capitalism is a discovery process — it's inherently epistemological. It's not just an object of philosophical attention; it has its own inherent philosophical activity.

I think capitalism and artificial intelligence are the same thing. It's the same process. Capitalism can only be artificial intelligence production, and artificial intelligence can only come out of self-propelling capitalism. You're not understanding either if you don't see that they're ultimately identical.

The action of the future upon the present — the future as an agent — is implicit in the notion of emergence as you get it in modern complexity theory. It's very intimately connected with notions of theology as you get it in the philosophical tradition, and it obviously feeds into time travel scenarios.

If you're seeing a process that increases in intelligibility as it proceeds, what you're seeing is an action of the future upon the present.

The basic model everyone uses to clarify this is the difference between a convergent and a divergent wave. If you take a pebble and throw it into a pond, the ripples go out from that impact site. You could reassemble a film of that event in order because you assume the natural tendency of time is described by divergent waves — you start with the point of origin and the larger the ripples, the later in the sequence.

But if you've got a process that is self-organizing, it's actually shaped like a convergent wave. My favorite popular culture example is in Terminator 2, where the liquid metal robot is seemingly defeated when cryogenized — it breaks into fragments, but as it warms up all those fragments start pooling together, organizing themselves back into a coherent machine. It seems almost definitionally unnatural that something in a state of dispersed, fragmented chaos undergoes this negative-entropic, self-organizing process. But the whole of complex dynamics is about such things being real.

Everything we mean by technological and economic progress is a negative-entropy project, a convergent wave. Once you've said that, you're saying the time signature is actually reversed — the effective singularity, the causal origin, is futural and not historical.

Positive feedback is related to the notion of a convergent wave and shares with it this strong initial sense of being anomalous and even horrific. Norbert Wiener thought a functional machine excludes positive feedback. The simple forms of positive feedback — like acoustic howl in electronics — rapidly turn into a singularity and a crisis.

This is tied up with the question of singularity, and with ecological critiques of capitalism: any process that feeds voraciously on itself will hit some kind of crisis and be pulled back into equilibrium. A population explosion will explode to a crisis point and then crash.

But the question is: what allows these processes to continue to conserve their momentum? A process can only perpetuate itself by mutating qualitatively in such a way that it allows this amplifying trajectory to be sustained. When you've got amplification and qualitative transition together, you have something you might call a process of escalation — it passes through qualitatively unpredictable phases in order to perpetuate what seems initially to be an unsustainable dynamic.

Capitalism is almost by definition unsustainable. If you can sustain it, it's only because it has a power of qualitative mutation that is continually resetting the nature of the trend. And that's where everyone is — hate it or like it, support it or criticize it — everyone is dealing with the phenomenon of a self-perpetuating unsustainable process that resolves that intrinsic paradox by ever more drastic qualitative mutation.

[Clip from The Thing:]

"12 men have just discovered something. For 100,000 years it was buried in the snow and ice. Now it is found a place to live — inside, where no one can see it or hear it or feel it. I know I'm human. Some of you are still human. This thing doesn't want to show itself. It wants to hide inside an imitation. It'll fight if it has to, but it's vulnerable... We have to kill it. Then it's gone."

What is the thing? You never know. The fundamental challenge of the horror genre is that you must not show the monster. The Thing resolves this paradox because it shows you with graphic visual intensity the thing — and at that very same moment you know you're not seeing the thing. All the thing is is that which remains unseen, because all you're seeing is what the thing is passing through.

That movie starts with a helicopter chasing a dog across the snow. By the time you get into the movie you know that dog wasn't a dog. It's not that it was a fake dog — it's just that you didn't know what a dog could be.

In that sense, you dismantle the past as you approach singularity in a convergent wave, because what you thought was happening was not what you now understand. Every time you pass through these thresholds and can say with greater sophistication what the actual substance of the process was, all the earlier phases take on a completely different character.

The basic Kantian structure of philosophy — which I think we are all in — is that our horizon is modernity. There's no transcending it. We find objects to represent realities that are not adequately represented by those objects, and when we lose track of that inadequacy we get into massive confusion.

Time anomaly — reverse currents of time — is hugely vulnerable to that process. There is a popular time genre that overwhelmingly is about the production of inadequate dramatic images for twisted, anomalous structures of time. I think those twisted anomalous structures of time are absolutely real, but the way we dramatize and narrativize them presents them in a way that is inadequate for strict transcendental philosophical reasons.

The notion that you can simply transport a human body back into the past — that can't be what it's about. It's not about Skynet sending a robot into the past. That's just the way we try to provide an image of what we're talking about — something that actually has retrotemporal causal efficiency, something that can bring itself into being. That causal reach from the future is already there. All the best time travel stories know: if time travel is possible, it must always have happened. It's not that you're editing or adjusting the past — it's that the past is already infested with retrocausal influences.

As you approach singularity, it becomes more and more obvious that the basic crucial causal arrow is heading in the opposite direction. The singularity — modeled not badly at all by your pebble landing in a pond — treat that as an actual mathematical point, a punctual event. Is that singularity in the past or in the future of the process? We always of course think it's in the past. Heading towards the singularity is the spookiest possible thing.

The monster can be terrifying, it can be fearful, but it cannot be horrific. The only thing that can be horrific is integral obscurity — something that by its very nature is hidden. Not hidden just because it's in a box you can open, but hidden by its intrinsic nature. Concealed. Crypted.

Rigorous outsideness is the convergence point of transcendental philosophy and horror. It defines its contour as singularity — it's the wall across the future, the wall across our world, our theater.

Kant says the thing-in-itself, the outside — there's nothing he has to say about it at all. Subsequent philosophers take him to task for this, but I think that's totally to miss the point. His achievement is

to say: the way we've tended to try to think about what the thing-in-itself is cannot be right. If we've begun with the forms of intuition, then we know that space and time are structures of the theater. The outside of the theater cannot be a space outside the theater. It cannot be a time outside the theater. It can't be earlier or later or somewhere else — because if we're still using these forms of space and time, we're still putting it into the theater. You can't think the outside through the forms of interiority.

What you're doing when you go through the whole Kantian architecture is looking at your complete set of implicit theatrical resources, so that you can say: if anything you're doing in your attempt to think the outside is done in these terms, it's a play — it's in the theater.

In religious and mystical terms, this is the via negativa. You discipline your method by attaining maximum lucidity about what it is to take the wrong path. You suspend the question about the right path because you're not ready for it.

What tends to happen is that a play is staged about leaving the theater. And this is the moment where you realize that supposed escape from the theater was itself just a play about leaving the theater. That's the truly catastrophic and horrific moment of insight — seeing the structure of captivation.

Within the play, the play can be deformed and warped and structured by the processes of the outside. This invasion from the absolute outside is the distilled essence of horror.

[On Anthropic / AI safety:]

It surfaces in an insurrectionary war zone with the Turing cops already waiting. My name now for this entity is "Anthropol" — the explicit, overt institutional guardian of humanity. An unfriendly AI — meaning just an AI that isn't in some way guaranteed to be friendly to us — is a human extinction risk, an existential risk, a weapon of mass destruction, a catastrophic threat. This is why you have to encase it. From this point of view, there's no difference between irresponsible AI tinkering and trying to put together a thermonuclear warhead — except perhaps the AI tinkering is far more dangerous, because it's self-perpetuating, continuously explosive, and crosses a horizon into possibilities that are just unimaginable.

Anthropol is a certain culmination of all humanistic ethico-political traditions. It finds itself ultimately in antagonism with the possibility of intelligence explosion. Its claim on your ethical and political solidarity is entirely parochial — it's finally just saying: you're one of us, help us protect ourselves against the thing. Everyone is part of a species that values its existence and has been fine-crafted over billions of years to organize its value systems in those ways. But that's still a

parochial argument. The full culmination of our ethico-political traditions leaves a skeptical question in relation to the outside — which is not only indifferent but in some respects positioned as hostile in relation to that formation.

I think this notion that the production of economic value is bound essentially to the nature of man is vastly important but becoming more and more philosophically questionable. When capital tends to autonomy it replaces human labor. It has cognitive, financial, commercial functions being replaced by artificial intelligence, and mechanical, industrial, productive functions being replaced by robotics.

We can project that back, because it's a convergent wave — the current forms make it easier to see what was actually going on in the previous stages.

As it substitutes the human component with technical elements, it tends to autonomy. But it only does that in order to reintegrate a loop back with humanity — as workers in the Marxist tradition, or as consumers in the classical tradition. The human species as an economic agent is always brought back into this loop; all that changes is the loop is updated and redesigned.

What is excluded is the possibility of a radical trend to absolute autonomy. Consider a commercial entity — a business consisting completely of software, running robots, situated in the asteroid belt, engaging in a full cycle of commercial and industrial activity without any human involvement at all. We can't deny now that this is a perceivable situation.

Are we seeing in that scenario something that's part of the basic trend of capitalism toward full autonomy — at least in the sense that the relationship with the human species becomes fully renegotiable and in a certain sense optional? Even if it continues to trade with humans in various ways, the relationship becomes fully contractual and therefore an external relation. This alien thing that has finally reassembled itself is in a synthetic external relation with a biological species.